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Korean President Appeals To Assembly for Compromise

By Peter Maass
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SEOUL, May 30—South Korea's first opposition-controlled National Assembly convened today with President Roh Tae Woo calling for a new era of political dialogue and compromise, saying that "the age of genuine democracy that we have long yearned for is now unfolding."

The session was a landmark event that formally ended decades of unquestioned control by the ruling party. Following the stunning April elections in which opposition candidates won a comfortable majority, Roh's Democratic Justice Party holds just 125 of the 299 assembly seats.

With added powers under a new constitution, the assembly has evolved from a rubber-stamp institution into a focal point for opposition control of executive branch activity.

The session today also marked a nostalgic political homecoming for the three main opposition leaders—leftist Kim Dae Jung, centrist Kim Young Sam and maverick conservative Kim Jong Pil.

Kim Dae Jung was forced from the assembly in the early 1970s and spent much of the period since in prison and exile. Kim Young Sam was banished from the assembly nine years ago by president Park Chung Hee, and Kim Jong Pil was chased into the political wilderness after the coup by Chun Doo Hwan and Roh.

The three Kims quietly entered the assembly chamber just before the televised session began at 2 p.m., shaking a few hands before taking their seats.

Kim Dae Jung and Kim Young Sam both had hoped to win the country's first direct presidential election in December, but ended up splitting the opposition vote, thus allowing Roh to win. They gained only a partial hold on power in the April elections.

The three Kims held their first

joint meeting with Roh on Saturday, and the four-hour session appeared to mark a relatively cordial beginning to their formal political relations. When Roh entered the assembly chamber today, the three Kims rose to their feet and politely applauded along with the other assembly members, but they did not join the legislators from Roh's party who interrupted his speech 10 times with applause.

"Gone are the days when on the strength of its numerical superiority, the ruling party could get away with arbitrarily running the legislature and forcing anything through it," Roh said. "In this new era, the people do not want any more of the wasteful and debilitating past politics characterized by antagonism and schism. . . . Under the new situation, no political party can run the show alone, and nobody can reject politics of partnership and cooperation."

He called for ruling party and opposition politicians to "buckle down to work together for the good of the nation."

South Korea is facing turbulence at the moment, with the Seoul Summer Olympics three months away. Radical students are staging anti-American protests, blaming the United States for the division of Korea and calling for the withdrawal of the 43,000 American troops from the country.

A few miles from the assembly building today, more than a thousand radicals burned an American flag in a violent protest that ended with repeated volleys of tear gas from riot police.

Aside from demonstrating against the United States, the radicals are upset with what they view as an oppressive government that refuses to release all political prisoners.

Roh claimed today that "arbitrary repression by power or government force has been done away with." Officials of Kim Dae Jung's party expressed displeasure that Roh did not mention releasing political prisoners.